

Creating Europe through Culture?
The impact of the European Song Contest on European identity¹

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Abstract: The UK's Brexit vote marked a major institutional crisis for the EU and re-opened both the scholarly and the popular debate about the importance and drivers of a "European identity". We use quasi-experimental data to estimate the immediate impact of the biggest pan-European cultural event, the Eurovision Song Contest, on whether people in Europe consider themselves to be Europeans. Using data from several Eurobarometer surveys with tens of thousands of observations, we find little evidence that the contest at current provides a sizeable immediate boost to the share of Europeans who feel European, feel EU citizens, or have a positive image of the EU.

Keywords: European Identity; Eurovision; Quasi-Experiment; Culture

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I. Introduction

The development of a European identity, Europeans' sense that they belong to Europe, is regarded by many observers as crucial for the future of the European Union (EU). Alesina *et al.* (2017), for example, write: "...the important issue for the future of European integration is not so much that Europeans are still too different from each other in terms of culture, policy preferences, or national interests. The important question is the evolution of national versus European identities."

Various factors that might influence the evolution of people's national identities have been explored in a vast body of academic literature. For example, Aspachs-Bracons *et al.* (2008) analyse the impact of language policy on national identity, while Clots-Figueras and Masella (2013) provide evidence of the link between education and national identity. Also the formation of specifically the European identity remains a much researched – as well as much debated – subject (for a recent overview of this field see Mendez and Bachtler (2016)). This paper contributes to the latter group of studies.

In this paper, we focus on one potential contributor to European identity, the most popular Europe-wide music festival, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). This song contest has a clear European profile, with artists representing most European countries, and with spectators from all over Europe determining who wins the contest. And while many commentators have argued that the European Song Contest is instrumental in making Europeans feel European, as far as we know, there are no studies that empirically analyse the impact of the ESC on European identity. In this analysis, we use a two-fold definition of European identity proposed by Mitchell (2015) which embraces cognitive and affective dimensions: individuals recognise that they are members of the group calls "Europeans" as well as attribute meanings and emotions to the membership.

For our analysis, we use data from several waves of Eurobarometer with several tens of thousands of observations and apply a quasi-experimental methodology, comparing the answers to questions related to the European identity of respondents who were interviewed just before the contest with the answers of respondents who were interviewed just after the contest.

Our analysis shows that, while we cannot exclude that the ESC has had a measurable impact in the past, there is little evidence that the contest currently provides a sizeable immediate boost to the number of Europeans who feel European, feel EU citizens, or have a positive image of the EU. This finding emerges despite the high level of brand recognition of the contest throughout Europe.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We first discuss the literature on the drivers of European identity and consider how the contest could contribute to the formation of a European identity. We then discuss our methodology and analyse the data of various Eurobarometer surveys. Section IV concludes.

II. The Eurovision Song Contest as a driver of European identity

a. Drivers of European identity

The concept of "European identity" and the factors behind it have attracted considerable scholarly attention, not lastly due to the complexity of the concept. Using Tajfel (1981)'s

argument about the multidimensional character of a collective identity in cognitive, evaluative and affective terms, Mitchell (2015, 332) defines European identity as follows: “In the European context, this suggests that individuals not only recognize that they are members of a group of ‘Europeans’ (cognition), but they also assign meaning (evaluation) and emotional value (affect) to that group membership (Herrmann and Brewer, 2004; Cram, 2012)”. This definition informs our analysis.

Mendez and Bachtler (2016) provide a comprehensive overview of the studies – both qualitative and quantitative – that analyse the determinants of European identity. In many of the quantitative studies, European identity is measured using the so-called “Moreno” question: “Do you in the near future see yourself as (nationality) only, (nationality) and European, European and (nationality) or European only?” This type of questions is argued by Mitchell (2015) to target a cognitive self-identification element, or “Identity *AS* Europeans”. It is also important, according to Mitchell, to assess “Identity *WITH* Europe”, or the “extent to which respondents identify *with* Europe (that is, feel an affective bond with the idea of ‘Europe’ and the community of Europeans it represents)” (Mitchell, 2015, 331). This second aspect can be assessed using questions that ask about the image Europeans have about the EU.

As micro determinants, studies identify *instrumental/functionalist calculations* (for example, those benefiting from EU support are more likely to identify with the project of European integration) and *transnational experiences and social interactions* (with more interaction leading to more identification with Europe). Mendez and Bachtler (2016) also single out the studies that factor national identities into the process of European identification. The *strength of pre-existing territorial identities* that exists on various levels (national and sub-national) is found to affect the formation and feeling of European identity. Similarly, the *level of trust in national political institutions* matters, with identification with the supranational EU-level institutions correlating with a low level of trust on the national level. Finally, Mendez and Bachtler’s (2016) summary mentions several *socio-demographic characteristics* identified by the relevant literature: higher levels of income, education and occupational status tend to correlate positively with levels of European identification.

Studies of macro determinants focus on exposure and persuasion. Mendez and Bachtler’s (2016) review includes studies that investigate the effect of the Euro and other European symbols, studies that analyse the effect of the EU’s media campaigns and studies that research initiatives that promote transnational interactions among Europeans. Methodologically closest to our study are studies that analyse how the salience of the EU in the media relates to indicators of support for the EU. De Vreese *et al.* (2016) for example relate news coverage of the EU around the 2014 Parliamentary elections in the Netherlands, to how Dutch respondents evaluate the performance of the EU. They find positive effects of exposure to news that was less negative. Similarly, Desmet *et al.* (2015) analysing data from around the 2009 parliamentary elections in 21 EU countries find that exposure to negative news about the EU is associated with negative evaluation of the democratic performance of the EU. Stoeckel (2011) focuses on identification with the EU (rather than support for the EU) and finds that in countries where media salience of the EU is high, individuals from higher social classes are more likely to identify with the EU.

The studies closest to ours in terms of subject are those that investigate initiatives – both supported and non-supported by the EU – that promote transnational interactions among Europeans. The impact of Erasmus programme on European identity was analysed among others in Mitchell (2015). There are also some papers that argue (but not empirically test) that European football competitions positively influence European identity (see for example, Brand

and Niemann (2014)). We are not aware of any empirical study linking the Eurovision Song Contest, a pan-European cultural event, to either identification with Europe or support for the EU, however.

b. The Eurovision Song Contest as a potential driver of European identity

Established in 1956, the ESC is organized by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), an alliance of public (or private but with a public service mission) radio and television stations. Most EU states have representatives in the EBU, but the EU and the EBU are generally unrelated to each other (even though the EBU is subject to the EU's legislation and regulations; European Commission, 2000). Some EBU members are even located outside the EU. In 2015, the EBU counted 73 active members from 56 countries and 34 associate members from 20 additional countries. Most of these member countries delegate a singer from their country to represent it in the contest. These songs are then presented, one after another, in evening-long TV shows, with the winner of the contest being chosen by the population of the member states, who can cast their vote by telephone or online.²

Academics have empirically studied the contest before, but so far studies focus on Eurovision voting. Some explain the patterns in Eurovision voting. For example, Ginsburg and Noury (2008) study how the linguistic and cultural proximities between countries affect voting, while Spierdijk and Vellekoop (2009) focus on the impact of geography. Others estimate the influence of these voting patterns on economic outcomes. For example, Felbermayer and Toubal (2010) and Kokko and Tingvall (2014) use the cultural preferences expressed in Eurovision voting to study the impact of culture on trade. As far as we are aware, our paper is the first, however, to link the contest to the formation of European identity.

The ESC, while not organized by the EU, is a very 'European' event. The 2015 final, for example, started with Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy', the EU's official anthem. Moreover, the theme of the 2015 Eurovision was 'Building Bridges', motivated as follows: "With 'Building Bridges' we have chosen a theme, the idea of Europe with the uniting character of music and that in Vienna, the traditional capital of world music in the heart of Europe." (Eurovision.tv, 2014). Typically, throughout the ESC broadcasts, spectators and performers wave with the flag of the countries they support. During the televised broadcast, short video clips introduce each country's performer in their home country setting, and then in the host country. These present various European countries for the spectators. Finally, people from throughout Europe can vote (by phone, SMS or online) for their preferred performer.³

Given this content, the contest as a possible contributor to European identity can be categorized in Mendez and Bachtler's (2016) review classification as an event that stimulates transnational interaction and experience.⁴ And indeed, many observers have linked ESC to the idea of "European identity":

² There are two semi-finals and one final.

³ But one cannot vote for the performer of one's own country.

⁴ Kantner (2006) defines three types of collective identity. First, "the universal we" is grounded in recognition of belonging to humankind in general and being capable of speech and action specifically (pp. 7–8). The second type is "weak collective identity", "a shared interpretation of the situation and/or awareness of being involved in a cooperative enterprise" (p. 8). Finally, the third type is a "strong collective identity" when those who share it undertake a passionate argument for normative convictions or values. This could be triggered by a "major

Eurovision offers its own vision of European citizenship. Although the website of the EBU makes clear that the broadcasting organization is distinct from and unrelated to the European Union and that its reach extends throughout the Mediterranean region to countries more usually considered to be parts of Africa and Asia, its Eurovision programming has nevertheless always stood for Europe ... the ESC was one such program intended from the outset to unite Europe through televised cultural events. If anything, it does so now more than ever. The former London correspondent for the Washington Post T.J. Reid argues that “Eurovision has become a celebration of Europeanness, a great annual coming-together that strengthens the growing sense among 500 million people that they all belong to a single place on the world map.” The British journalist Ben MacIntyre concurs, asserting that “the Eurovision Song Contest is a cultural monument to what most Europeans think it means to be European.” He concludes: “In the end, Eurovision is less a contest than an idea, a vision of Europe, a long-running exercise in hopeful internationalism that is simultaneously naff, hilarious and oddly touching”. (Tobin, 2007, p. 27)

Watching Eurovision is often when people first realise that their nation is only one of many in Europe and around the World, she said. This helps viewers “feel” more European and plays an important part in forming contemporary European citizenship. (Dr Karen Fricker, cited in Eurovision.tv, 2015)

In 1999, the French media sociologist Philippe le Guern issued a general warrant, calling upon fellow researchers to locate a fugitive. Name: “TV fiction expressing a European identity”. He also proposed a major European research project to this end. Media researchers in Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, Italy and The Netherlands answered the call, searched high and low, but in the end came up empty-handed. Either the description was too sketchy or the fugitive was wandering about elsewhere – perhaps incognito, perhaps suffering from amnesia. The closest thing the researchers turned up, the one programme that fostered a pan-European sense of identity and elicited dialogue sans frontières, was the annual Eurovision Song Contest. The point of this contest is, explicitly, for songwriters and singers of the participating countries to express national idiosyncrasies in ways that are calculated to appeal to as much of Europe as possible. (Agger, 2001)

By blending the transnational bodies and international superstars and multicultural performers into a particular national identification, Eurovision springs these relations from national to European, and even global, which encourages the rethinking of the very idea of Citizenship. (Akšamija, 2005)

In 2016 Eurovision was awarded the Charlemagne Medal for the European Media, a prize “awarded to a European personality or institution that has contributed to European unity and the development of a European identity in the field of media in a particularly significant way”.

historical event (either catastrophic or fortunate), initiation of the collective project, or a major revision of it ...” (p. 9). Eurovision clearly contributes to the first two and has the potential to contribute to the third, for example after a victory in the contest.

The Chairman of the Charlemagne Medal Board of Directors, Jürgen Linden, explains the prize as follows: “On the basis of a common liking of music, millions of people celebrate one idea together, an idea resulting in one song emerging victorious. National interests and differences fade into the background as we celebrate our similarities.” Similarly, Michael Kayser, the Chairman of the Médaille Charlemagne Association, is quoted as saying, “We, the citizens of Europe, rarely get the opportunity to feel interconnected across borders. The Eurovision Song Contest presents such an opportunity” (Eurovision.tv, 2016).

It is not only experts who link the ESC to European identity. A 2013 YouGov poll (see Table 1) shows that a sizeable part of the population of the surveyed countries believes that the contest brings Europe closer together.

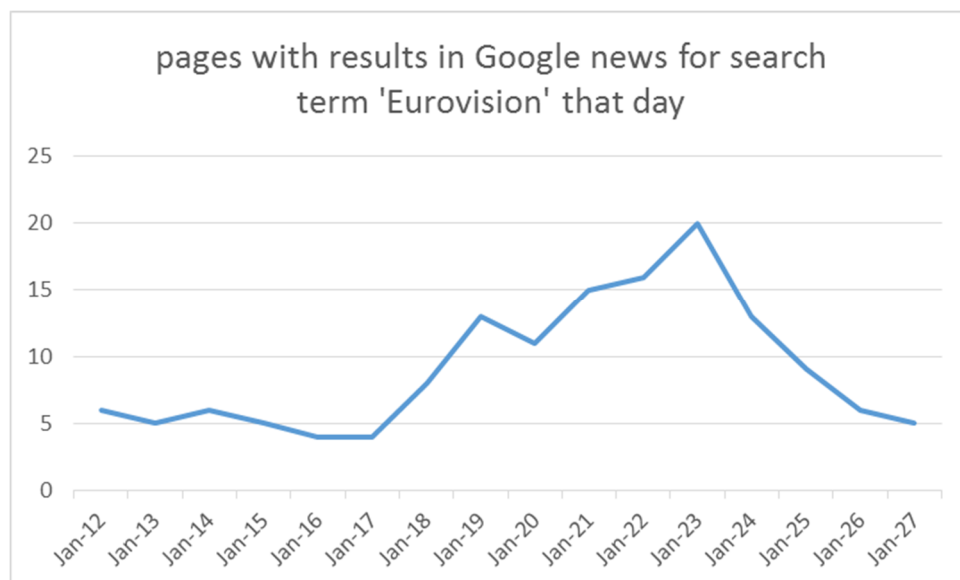
Table 1. Do you believe that the Eurovision Song Contest does or does not bring Europe closer together?

	GB	Germany	France	Denmark	Sweden	Finland	Norway
Sample size (#)	1722	1012	999	1013	1012	932	669
Yes (%)	14	23	20	22	33	32	30
No (%)	76	66	68	66	52	56	55
D.K. (%)	10	12	12	12	15	12	15

YouGov (2013)

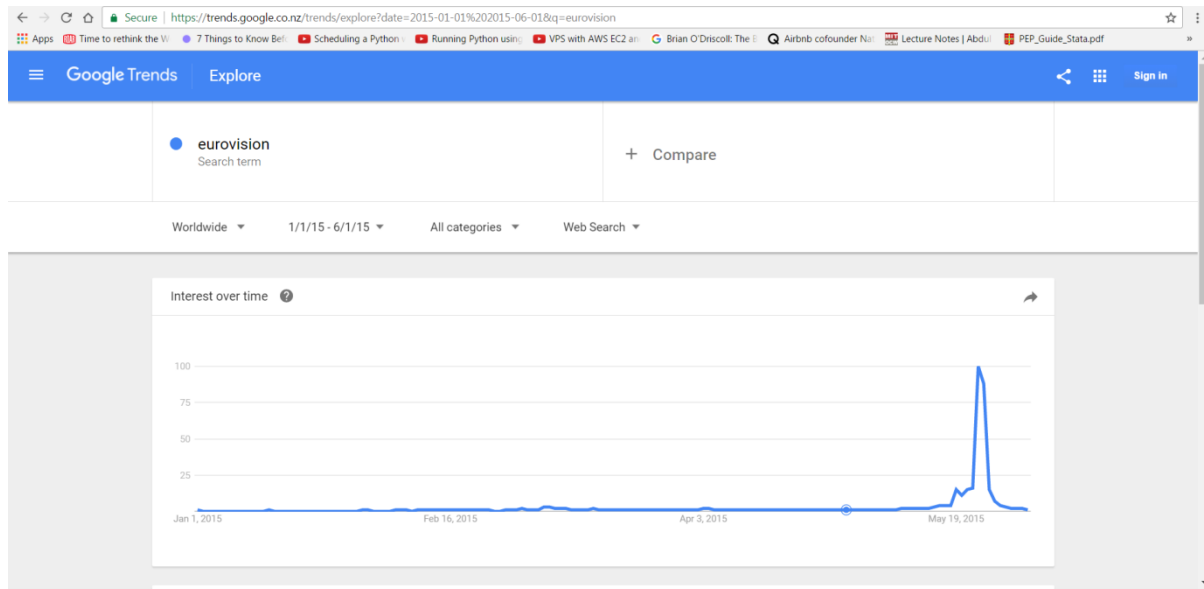
Note, however, that it might not be necessary actually to watch the broadcasts of the Eurovision events themselves to be affected, as the contest is covered broadly by traditional and internet media in the period around the event. Figure 1 illustrates this well. It approximates the press coverage with the number of Google News pages for a given day when searching for “Eurovision” in May 2015. While the coverage was limited before the first semi-final (around five pages of search results), it increased quickly on the day of the final (around 20 pages of search results).

Figure 1: Number of Google News search result pages for “Eurovision” by date, May 2015



Google Trends provides further evidence for the salient profile of the Eurovision event (Figure 2). The search intensity for the word ‘Eurovision’ between 1 January and the beginning of May 2015 is very low. The intensity increases somewhat in the second week of May to reach 4 by 18 May, then hovers around 15 between 19 May (the day of the first semi-final) and 22 May to reach 100 on 23 May (the day of the final). It then drops to 88 on 24 May and 15 by 25 May.

Figure 2: Search intensity for “Eurovision” by date, May 2015



This salience of Eurovision as a pan-European event means that *priming* effects are possible (see Cohn and Marechal, 2016, for a review of economics studies that use priming, defined by Cohn and Marechal (2016) as ‘the activation of mental concepts through subtle situational cues’). Following this logic, with people being more aware of this pan-European event and arguably about wider Europe around the contest’s events, they might also feel more affiliated with Europe, even if they do not watch the contest.

Note that a 2016 YouGov poll suggests that almost everybody knows about the ESC and that most respondents have watched it at some point (Table 2).

Table 2: Have you ever watched the Eurovision Song Contest?

	GB	Germany	France	Denmark	Sweden	Finland	Norway
Sample (#)	2033	2060	1001	1010	1025	1006	620
Yes (%)	82	79	70	91	93	92	90
No (%)	16	19	28	8	6	7	8
D.K. ESC (%)	2	2	3	1	1	1	3

YouGov (2016). D.K. stands for don’t know.

III. Data and methodology

a. Data, estimation approach and basic results

To assess whether the contest may boost European identity in cognitive and affective terms, one cannot just compare the European identity of people who watch the contest with the European identity of those who do not. Indeed, self-selection would confuse such a comparison, as it is very likely that those who feel European are more likely to watch and follow the contest.

To assess whether the contest boosts European identity, ideally one would instead run an experiment that would randomly expose some people to the Eurovision “experience” (the shows and the news coverage around the shows) while others would not be exposed. The difference in European identity between the treatment and the control group would then provide a causal estimate of the impact of Eurovision. In practice this experiment would be hard to implement, because the contest is so widely discussed around the day of the final that one would have to isolate the control group for a couple of days. Self-selection into such an experiment would also be hard to avoid as people who want to see the ESC would self-select out of the control group.

Since such an experiment is hard to implement, we follow the second-best approach and use the results of a quasi-experiment. We compare respondents who were interviewed shortly before Eurovision, and hence were not exposed to the Eurovision experience that year, with respondents who were interviewed shortly after Eurovision, and hence were arguably exposed to the Eurovision experience (directly or indirectly).

Such a quasi-experimental approach has been used in various settings. Metcalfe *et al.* (2011) use this approach to assess the impact of terrorism on happiness and find a significant negative effect of the 9/11 attacks on happiness in the UK. Bassi and Rasul (2016) evaluate the impact of a papal visit on fertility-related beliefs and behaviour, finding that the papal visit reduced individual intentions to use contraception by more than 40% relative to the pre-visit levels. Jakiela and Ozer find that post-election violence increased the risk averseness of Kenyans, while Goebel *et al.* (2015) show that the Fukushima disaster increased environmental concerns among Germans.

The data that we use come from the Eurobarometer surveys implemented in May 2011, 2013 and 2015 in the EU states and in the candidate countries.⁵ Since 2010, the Eurobarometer May surveys have focused on how Europeans perceive various aspects of the EU.

In 2011, 2013 and 2015, the contest took place during the survey period. For example, in 2015, the survey was implemented between 16 May and 27 May, while the semi-finals were held on 19 and 21 May and the final on the evening of Saturday 23 May.

This data set thus allows us to use a “quasi-experimental” approach. The ESC in a given year can be seen as an experimental treatment in which respondents who were interviewed before the ESC took place can serve as a control group, as they were not exposed to the treatment, and respondents who were interviewed after ESC can be considered as those receiving the treatment. Assuming that the time of the interview was determined randomly (an assumption

⁵ The data set was downloaded from the GESIS data archive – <https://www.gesis.org/eurobarometer-data-service/survey-series/standard-special-eb/study-overview/> – except for the 2015 survey, for which the date of the interview was not included in the GESIS data set but obtained from Kantar Public Brussels, which implements the Eurobarometer surveys.

to which we will return below), the differences between the control and the treatment group reflect the causal effect of the experimental treatment.

We can distinguish three different groups of respondents. First, we have the “untreated” respondents, who were interviewed before the first semi-final, that is, in the case of 2015, before or on 19 May 2015. For 2015, this group contains about 36% of all the respondents and consists of individuals who have not experienced the main Eurovision events. While Eurovision is a yearlong event with national qualifiers and some news about Eurovision occurring even before the start of the semi-finals, these early activities do not reach the level of exposure of the televised events. Moreover, these events throughout the year mainly focus on the national contribution to Eurovision rather than presenting the Europe-wide contestants and their backgrounds – hence, the contribution of these events to European identity (if any) is likely to be small compared with the impact of the high-profile concluding events.

The second group consists of the respondents interviewed between the semi-finals and the final. For 2015, they were interviewed after 19 May but before or on 23 May. This group contains about 43% of the respondents and consists of people who received some treatment but not the full treatment. The semi-finals are likely to be followed less closely, since less is at stake. Moreover, there are two semi-finals (the second took place on 21 May), each covering only some of the countries (33 countries participated in the semi-finals, 20 of which qualified for the final). Moreover, the five biggest “old” European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom) and the organizing country (Austria in 2015) qualified automatically (as did a guest country in 2015, Australia).

Finally, the third group of respondents, those interviewed after 23 May, received the full treatment. They had the possibility to watch three televised events and be exposed to the voluminous media coverage. About 21% of all the respondents in 2015 are in this group.

We study the impact of the ESC on three questions that gauge the respondents’ European identity both in cognitive and affective terms:

Question qd1_1 asks “Do you feel that you are a citizen of the EU?” The possible answers are “yes” (1), “to some extent” (2), “not really” (3) and “no” (4). Over the 3 years, we have about 80,000 observations for this question. Only respondents in EU countries were asked this question.

Question qd2 asks “Do you see yourself as ...?” The possible answers are (1) the respondent’s nationality only, (2) the respondent’s nationality and European, (3) European and the respondent’s nationality and (4) only European. This question was not asked in 2011, giving us a sample of about 54,000 observations.

Some might argue not only that the contest has the potential to stimulate European identity but also that the competitive format of the contest stimulates the formation of the national identity. As we consider any answer to the above question that includes “European” as support for Europe, the score for this variable will not be affected as long as the competitive format does not destroy European identity, that is, as long as the formation of identity is not a zero-sum game and European identity is just one of the many aspects of an individual’s identity, which has meaning in certain contexts and situations.

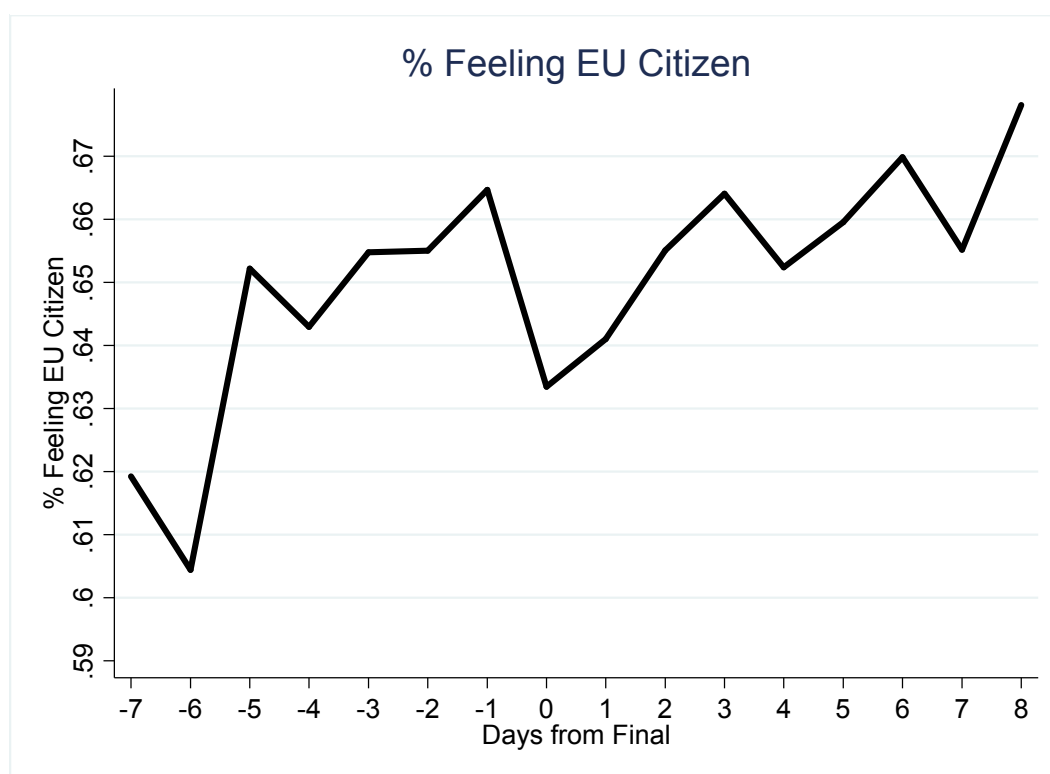
Finally, question qa2 asks “In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive (1), fairly positive (2), neutral (3), fairly negative (4) or very negative image (5)?” This question was posed to the respondents in all three years, giving us a sample of about 80,000 people.⁶

As discussed above, Mitchell (2015) divides European identity into two aspects: “identity *AS* Europeans” and “identity *WITH* Europe”. The former refers to “self-identification *as* European”; the latter refers to the “extent to which respondents identify *with* Europe (that is, feel an affective bond with the idea of ‘Europe’ and the community of Europeans it represents)”. In our empirical work, the first two questions thus reflect “identity *as* European”, while the third question reflects “identity *with* Europe”.

For simplicity of interpretation, we collapse the answers to the three questions into binary variables that take the value one if the respondent favours Europe and zero otherwise.⁷

Figures 3 to 5 present the evolution of the support for Europe during the survey period, with the horizontal axis being the days to the day of the final and 0 being the date of the final. The first semi-final took place on day -4 and the second semi-final on day -2.⁸

Figure 3: Evolution of the share of respondents who feel they are EU citizens



⁶ Unlike the first 2 questions, this question was also posed to respondents in 5 candidate countries, but we exclude these observations, focusing only on the respondents from the 28 EU member states.

⁷ For the first question, answers (1) and (2) are coded as 1, for the second question, any answer other than (1) is coded as 1 and, for the last question, answers (1) and (2) are coded as 1. Respondents who gave no answer are excluded from the sample.

⁸ While we have data from day -8 to day +12, we only show the days for which we have data for all the years for the sake of comparability across days.

Figure 3 suggests that there is an increase in the share of people who feel that they are European citizens starting the day before the first semi-final, then a drop during the day of the final, after which there is again an increase.

Figure 4: Evolution of the share of the respondents who see themselves as European

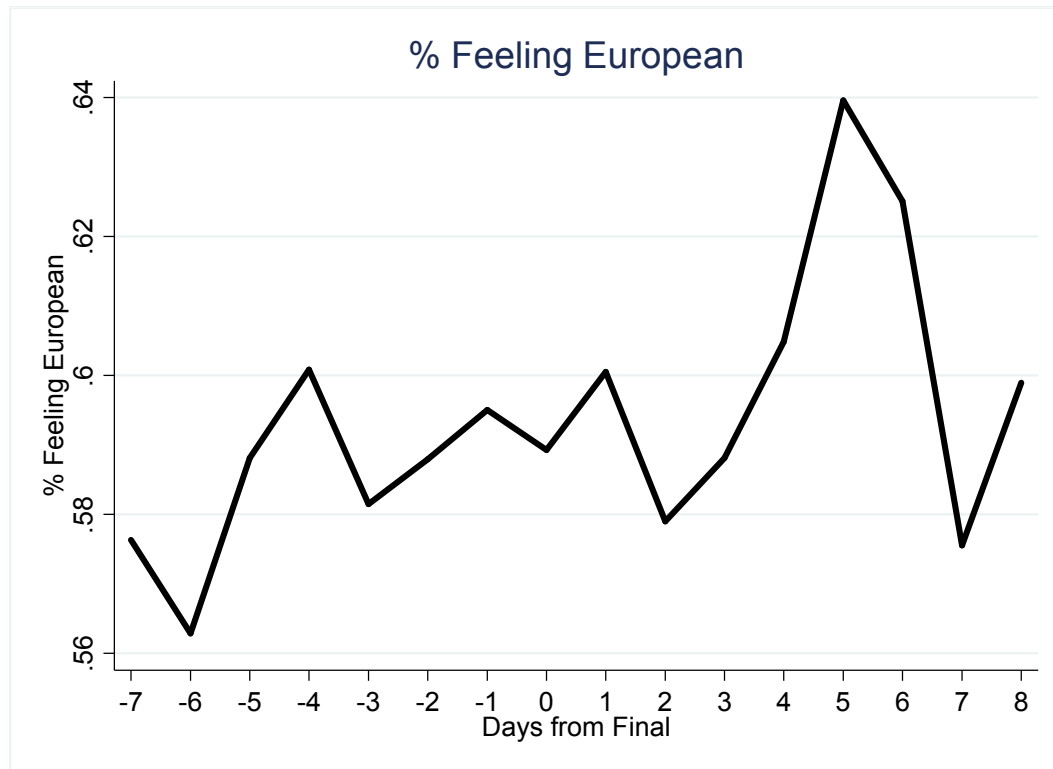


Figure 4 suggests that there is an increase in the share of people who feel European, starting on the day before the first semi-final and followed by an oscillating pattern.

Figure 5: Evolution of the share of the respondents who have a positive image of the EU

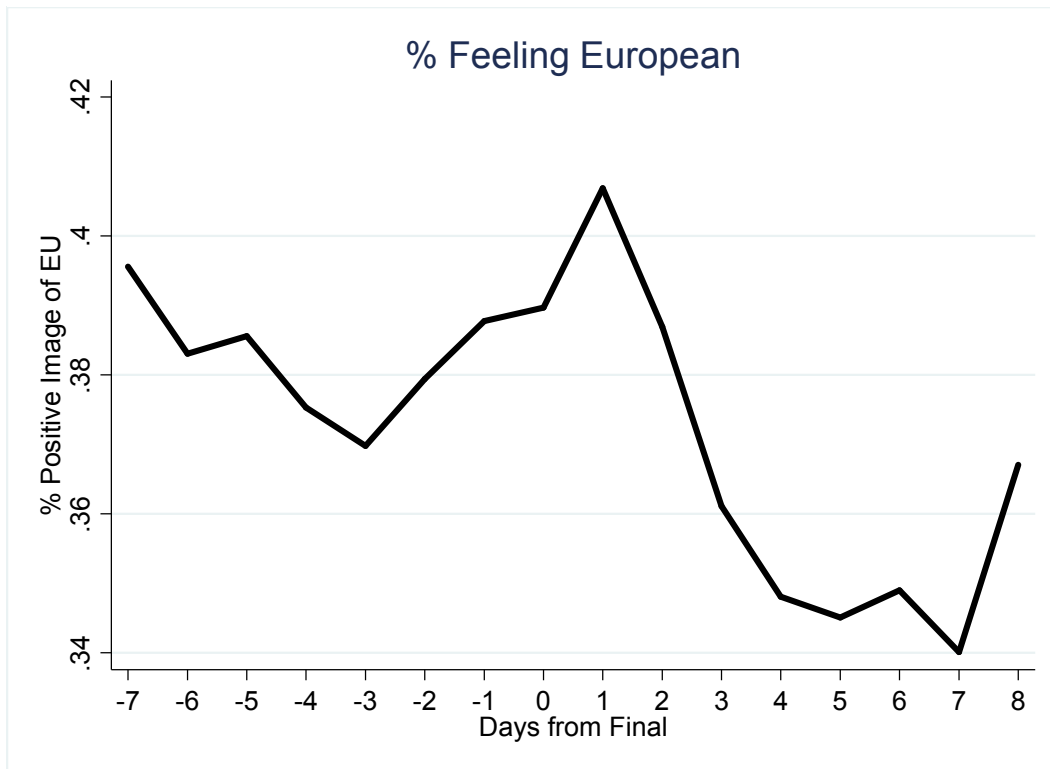


Figure 5 suggests that there is a decrease in the share of people who have a positive image of the EU until after the first semi-final, then an increase until the day after the final, after which there is again a decrease.

Table 3 analyses the above data more formally and presents the results of a linear probability model regression with robust standard errors, with a dummy for the period before the first semi-final and a dummy for the period after the final as explanatory variables. The comparison period is thus the period between the first semi-final and the final.

Table 3: EU identity and the ESC: linear probability model results

	EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image
Before semi-finals	-0.016***	-0.001	0.002
	0.004	0.005	0.004
After finals	0.006	0.010*	-0.014***
	0.004	0.005	0.004
Controls	No	No	No
R2	0.00	0.00	0.00
N	80226	54101	81874

Coefficients and standard errors are given in the table. *** means significant at the 1% significance level and * significant at the 10% level. The omitted category reflects the interview days between the first semi-final and the final.

We find that, in the period before the contest events, respondents are significantly less likely to feel like EU citizens, about 1.6 percentage points less, than in the period after the start of the ESC. Similarly, respondents are significantly less likely to feel European, about 1 percentage point less, before the final of the ESC. In contrast, after the final, the share of people with a

positive image of the EU significantly decreases. While these effects move in opposite directions, the size of the effect in either direction is reasonably limited in absolute terms compared with the average level of about 37.6% of respondents who have a positive image of the EU, 65% of respondents who feel that they are EU citizens and 59% of respondents who feel European. Hence, our results suggest that, regardless of the direction of the immediate impact of the contest, it was small at best.

b. How strong is our identification strategy?

Our identification strategy to estimate the impact of the ESC on European identity so far assumes that no other events that also could affect European identity occurred during our estimation period. Online sites (onthisday.com, [2015 current events on infoplease.com](http://2015.current.events.on.infoplease.com)) that record major events suggest that fairly little happened in the period around the contest in 2011, 2013 and 2015. One possible confounding factor for Ireland could be the referendum on 22 May 2015 that legalized same-sex marriage (62.1% in favour), which could affect the way in which Irish respondents identify themselves with their own country (related to question 2). Similarly, the Ice Hockey Championship in May 2013 could influence the answers of respondents in the Scandinavian countries. However, even these events are likely to affect only a small part of the sample. ‘Europe Day’, marking the date of the Schuman Declaration (the initial proposal that lead to the creation of the EU) is typically celebrated on May 9th in Europe but receives, compared to the ESC, very limited attention. Note that the overall period between May 2011 and May 2015 is characterised by large-scale ongoing crises in Europe, including the sovereign debt crisis inside the EU and Ukraine’s crisis in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood. This dividing background questioned the notion of European identity, yet highlights a potential unifying impact of such “feel-good” pan-European events as ESC.

Further, to achieve random assignment to the control and treatment groups, as the analysis so far implicitly assumes, we need to assume that respondents’ date of interview is set randomly.

It is probably true that the respondents do not chose their date of interview as a function of their European identity. Thus, self-selection based on European identity is unlikely to be an issue here. However, it is possible that some of the determinants, observable or not, of European identity affect the date of the interview. While not obvious ex ante, one could generate some plausible stories. For example, more educated people (who have been found to be more Euro-minded (see for example, Chalmers and Dellmuth 2015)) could be more likely to delay their interview than less educated people.

We therefore check whether there are significant differences between the control and the treatment group in terms of the observable characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, self-identified socio-economic situation and level of education. A random assignment to the control or treatment group would mean that there are no significant differences in these characteristics between the control and the treatment group. At the same time, given our sample size of several tens of thousands of respondents, even small differences can be significant, so both the size and the significance of the differences need to be taken into account.

Table 4: Differences in possible control variables by the time of the interview

	Before	Between	After	Diff. (absolute)	p-value
Men (%)	46.7	44.8		2	0
Men (%)		44.8	45.3	0.6	0.2
Age (# years)	48.4	49.5		1.2	0
Age (# years)		49.5	50.1	0.5	0
Higher educated (%)	31.5	29.8		1.7	0
Higher educated (%)		29.8	30.6	0.8	0.06
Middle class and up (%)	54.5	51.9		2.6	0
Middle class and up (%)		51.9	50.7	1.2	0

The t tests are based on unequal variances.⁹

Table 4 suggests that there are several significant differences, though typically these differences are fairly small. In the analysis below, we include these control variables in a regression analysis.

Moreover, two more variables could create non-randomness. First, the days of the week included in the control period are different from those in the treatment period. For example, the days between the semi-final and the final are always Wednesday to Saturday; hence, Mondays are never in the period between the semi-final and the final. Second, different countries have different interview schedules throughout the period, meaning that the control and the treatment group are likely to have different compositions in terms of country. Given that these different countries have different patterns in their citizens identifying *with* Europe and *as* Europeans, differences in country composition can lead to differences between the control and the treatment group. While countries are unlikely to have chosen their interview schedule as a function of their European identity, given that the number of countries is quite low, the chance that there is a spurious correlation between the country's timing schedule and its patterns of its citizens identifying *with* Europe and *as* Europeans is non-negligible. In our regression analysis, we therefore also control for both the day of the week and the country of the respondent.¹⁰

Table 5 presents the results of a linear probability model with robust standard errors, with as explanatory variables a dummy for the period before the first semi-final, a dummy for the period after the final and the abovementioned control variables.

⁹ Whether these t-tests are relevant is controversial (see McKenzie, 2017).

¹⁰ In a joint test of these factors (see McKenzie, 2017), we easily reject the null of no significant coefficients. Not surprisingly, the day of the week and country explain a large chunk in the variation in the interview group to which a respondent is allocated, with other factors contributing little to the R^2 .

Table 5: European identity and the Eurovision Song Contest: linear probability regression results

	EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image
Before semi-finals	-0.007	0.011	0.000
	0.006	0.007	0.005
After final	-0.008*	0.011	0.009*
	0.005	0.007	0.005
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R2	0.11	0.11	0.08
N	79088	53303	80706

Coefficients and standard errors are given in the table. *** means significant at the 1% significance level and * significant at the 10% level. The controls include country dummies, day-of-the-week dummies, age, gender and dummies for socioeconomic status and education. The omitted category reflects interview days between the first semi-final and the final.

The results in Table 5 show no significant effect of the ESC on the share of respondents who feel European. We find a small decrease, less than a percentage point drop, in the share of respondents who feel like a citizen of the EU after the final and a small increase, less than a percentage point jump, in the share of people who have a positive image of the EU. Note that all these effects are estimated quite precisely, making it unlikely that the contest had a substantial immediate effect on the public identifying itself *with* Europe or *as* Europeans.¹¹

c. Reach of the ESC

Note further that Table 5 reflects the impact of the intention to treat rather than treatment itself. While the contest, in principle, could reach all the respondents interviewed after a given date, it is very likely that not all Europeans watch the Eurovision broadcasts or are informed about it in any other way and hence become “treated”.

After the 2015 ESC, the EBU announced that:

The Eurovision Song Contest was seen by almost 200 million viewers in its 60th anniversary year. The three live shows from Vienna, Austria on 19, 21 and 23 May reached 197 million people in 40 countries – 2 million more than in 2014. The Grand Final of the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest achieved, on average, an audience share of 39.6% across 40 markets – more than double the average prime-time viewing share for the same group of channels (16.4%). (Eurovision.tv, 2015)

Hence, Eurovision is reaching a large amount of people in Europe, and in many countries the ESC final is the most popular television show on the day. However, it is important to put the “200 million viewers” number in perspective.

First, as is clear from the EBU’s “ESC TV Audience Report” (EBU, 2016), the 200 million viewers are unlikely to be 200 million unique viewers. The 2016 report suggests that 63 million people viewed the final. Assuming that the final is somewhat more popular than each of the semi-finals, the 200 million people is the sum of the number of people who viewed at least one

¹¹ If we use a probit model rather than an OLS model, we obtain similar results, with none of the marginal effects being significant at the 10% significance level.

of the three events. It is likely, however, that many of the people who viewed the semi-finals also watched the finals and hence unlikely that 200 million unique viewers watched the contest¹².

Second, a market share of about 40% does not mean that 40% of all Europeans watched the final. As the data for 2016 make clear, the share of the population that watched the final is roughly about a third of the market share, as many people do not watch TV on Saturday evening (Laufer, 2016).

Note that, in addition to watching ESC on television, people can follow the ESC online or via radio. And even those who do not watch the event are likely to be exposed to it via the news in the press. As presented in Table 2, the 2016 YouGov poll revealed that only fewer than 3% of the respondents in Great Britain, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway had never heard of Eurovision. YouGov finds that large majority of respondents across these European countries had seen Eurovision at some point in the past (ranging from 70% in France to over 90% in the Nordic countries). When asked about their plans for 2016, many people intended to watch it, from 22% of the French to 54% of the Swedish respondents.

To determine whether the lack of influence of the contest is due to a lack of interest in the contest rather than because the contest fails to convince those who watch or are aware of the contest, we next restrict the sample to the countries where the contest is most popular: the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland and Denmark), Belgium and the Netherlands.

Table 6 presents the results of the linear probability model regressions on the sample restricted to large-audience countries.

Table 6: European identity and the ESC: linear probability model – large-audience countries only

	Feel EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image	Feel EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image
Before semi-finals	0.008	0.018	0.012	-0.01	0.031*	0.019
	0.01	0.012	0.01	0.013	0.017	0.014
After final	-0.009	-0.004	-0.013	-0.011	0.024*	0.012
	0.009	0.011	0.009	0.011	0.015	0.011
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
R adj. sq.	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.1	0.06
N	15113	9969	15117	14923	9860	14923

Coefficients and standard errors are given in the table. *** means significant at the 1% significance level and * significant at the 10% level. The controls include country dummies, day-of-the-week dummies, age, gender and dummies for socioeconomic status and education. The omitted category reflects interview days between the first semi-final and the final.

If we use only the Eurovision dummies and no controls, we find small point estimates and no significant effects. If we do include controls, we find a positive significant effect on feeling European, but we find this both before the first semi-final and after the final, suggesting that the European feeling is greatest between the first semi-final and the final. We find no significant effect on feeling like an EU citizen or on having a positive image of the EU. Hence, the overall

¹² Moreover, not all of these are necessarily European.

picture that we obtain is very similar to the one that we received from the full sample, which opposes the idea that there was no impact of the ESC just because it fails to reach a sizeable part of the population.

As an alternative, given that the exposure to Eurovision is likely to vary with the performance at Eurovision, we present below the results for those countries that did not participate in the event and for those countries that reached the final.

Table 7: European identity and the ESC: linear probability model – countries that did not participate versus countries that reached the final

Sample	Countries that did not participate			Countries that reached the final		
	Feel EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image	Feel EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image
Before semi-finals	-0.000	-0.029*	-0.012	-0.01	0.012	0.005
	0.01	0.017	0.013	0.007	0.009	0.008
After final	-0.006	0.019	0.003	-0.009	0.006	0.012*
	0.01	0.016	0.01	0.007	0.008	0.007
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R adj. sq.	0.12	0.13	0.08	0.1	0.11	0.08
N	17316	7849	17277	45503	33702	45293

Coefficients and standard errors are given in the table. *** means significant at the 1% significance level and * significant at the 10% level. The controls include country dummies, day-of-the-week dummies, age, gender and dummies for socioeconomic status and education. The omitted category reflects interview days between the first semi-final and the final.

Again, there is little evidence of a substantial impact of the contest. While most coefficients are insignificant and small, we do find that, in the countries that did not participate, the respondents were about 3% less likely to indicate that they feel European before the first semi-final, and, in countries that reached the finals, the respondents were a little more likely to have a positive image of the EU after the final. Note that we also experimented with a specification in which the impact of the “after-final” dummy could depend on the place that a country obtained in the final. No such interactions were significant, however.

d. Long-run effects

So far, we have focused on the short-run impact of Eurovision. One could argue, however, that, rather than there being an immediate impact of the event, the impact could be delayed. For this, we added the data from the November Eurobarometer surveys of 2011, 2013 and 2015, which have the same questions as the May survey. Table 8 reruns the regressions of Tables 3 and 5 using this larger data set and adds a November dummy.

Table 8: European identity and the ESC: linear probability model using a sample including data from November 2011, 2013 and 2015

	EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image	EU citizen	Feel European	EU positive image
Before semi-finals	-0.016***	-0.001	0.002	-0.002	0.007	0.004
	0.004	0.005	0.004	0.005	0.006	0.005
After finals	0.006	0.010*	-0.014***	-0.003	0.008	0.011***
	0.004	0.005	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.004
November	-0.012***	-0.021***	-0.042***	-0.017***	-0.018***	-0.032***
	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.004	0.004
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
R adj. sq.	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.11	0.06
N	135130	108425	163791	133,045	106,709	14923

Coefficients and standard errors are given in the table. *** means significant at the 1% significance level and * at the 10% level. The controls include country dummies, day-of-the-week dummies, age, gender and dummies for socioeconomic status and education. The omitted category reflects interview days between the first semi-final and the final.

Interestingly, while this does not affect the general impression that the immediate impact of the contest is hard to observe, we obtain smaller levels of EU identification in November than in May across different specifications. The difference is still relatively modest, ranging from -1.7 to -3.2 percentage points, depending on the question.

To determine whether this higher level of EU identification in May can be observed over a longer period, we next focus on the image question. This question, unlike the two other questions, has been asked regularly since 2000. Table 9 below provides the results of an OLS regression, regressing the share of people who have a positive image of the EU (defined as above) in a country on an indicator for the period of the survey, using the November survey as a benchmark.¹³ We include country-year fixed effects and hence compare the survey results for a given country in a given year.

¹³ The data were downloaded from <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/19/groupKy/102>

Table 9: Is there a May effect?

	2000–2016	Before 2010	2010 and later
Feb.–April survey	-0.004	-0.002	
	0.01	0.005	
May survey	0.015***	0.02***	0.015***
	0.004	0.007	0.004
Sept.–Oct. survey	-0.006		
	0.008		
Year-country effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
R adj. sq.	0.96	0.96	0.94
N	724	327	397

We exclude the 2000, 2001 and 2009 surveys, since only one survey including the image question in those years. OLS regression with robust standard errors. The benchmark in the first and third columns is November and that for the second column is September–October.

Table 9 suggests that the May survey effect can be observed both in the overall sample and when we break up the sample into the periods before and after 2010. From 2010, surveys were consistently conducted in May and November, while, before 2010, the month of the survey varied. Interestingly, other months are not significantly different from November.

One could argue that the fact that we observe a somewhat stronger pro-European stance in May suggests a positive effect of the song contest; that is, the contest has a somewhat long-run effect, even though we do not see much of an effect over the various stages of the contest. One can produce reasons other than the ESC for this May effect, however, like the weather being better in May than in February–April or in September–October.

Finally, one could argue that we do not see a short run impact because there could have been an impact in the initial years the ESC and that that impact has become permanent. Or, related, that there has been a cumulative impact over the years but that now that impact is permanent and stable. Hence, while our results suggest that in the period 2011–2015, the ESC did not provide a substantial immediate boost to European identity, we cannot exclude the possibility that the ESC has had such an impact in the past. Advertising research does suggest however that the impact of advertising typically decays over time (see for example, Aravindakshan and Naik (2011) or Tellis and Franses (2006)).

IV. Conclusions

In this paper, we investigate whether the European Song Contest, the biggest pan-European music festival, provides a boost to European identity, increasing the identification of EU citizens *with* Europe and *as* Europeans. We use data from several waves of the Eurobarometer surveys with several tens of thousands of respondents and a quasi-experimental methodology, comparing the answers of respondents who were interviewed just before and after the contest.

While we find some evidence that respondents to surveys in May, when the contest takes place, are somewhat more likely to identify with Europe than respondents to surveys in other months of the year, we find no substantial increase around the days of the contest in May in the share of respondents who feel European, feel like an EU citizen or have a positive image of the EU. This suggests that anybody who counts on currently creating substantial Europe-wide increases

in European identification *with* Europe and *as* Europeans through the European Song Contest is likely to be disappointed.

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